

# CONSTIPATION

The body gets rid of waste through bowel movements. Every person has a pattern that is normal for him or her, whether the person moves his or her bowels once a day or every three days. The bowel movements should be soft, formed, and it should not hurt or cause bleeding. If a person has a bowel movement less often than usual, then they may be constipated. Constipation occurs when too much water is absorbed from the stool in the intestine and the stool becomes hard and dry. Constipation can often be prevented by increased fluid and fiber intake.

## Symptoms of constipation:

- Less frequent bowel movements (fewer than usual pattern)
- Stools that are hard, dry, and difficult to pass
- Grunting or straining during bowel movements
- Swollen belly
- Belly tenderness
- Increased gas, either flatus or burping
- Decreased appetite
- Small amounts of liquid stool (liquid stool leaking around hard stool)

## What causes constipation?

- Decreased fluid intake
- Some medications, especially antipsychotics, muscle relaxants, or pain medications
- Drug toxicity
- Decreased physical activity such as walking
- Neuromuscular disease such as cerebral palsy
- Physical deformities that affect the intestine
- Lack of enough fiber in the diet
- Changes in toileting routines
- Stress
- Pain when eliminating – may be caused by hemorrhoids or skin irritations
- Obstruction in the intestine

## What should you do?

### Call 911 if the person appears:

- Gravely ill
- Gray in color
- In severe pain
- To have a large amount of blood in their stools

### In other situations:

Consult your nurse or health care consultant.

- If the individual is sick, call the health care provider.
- If the person is constipated, increase fluid, dietary fiber, and exercise.
- Check their bowel pattern over the past few days. If the person has had only small movements over the past few days, they may need a laxative (stool softener). Consult their health care provider.
- Notify the health care provider if there are no results from laxatives.
- Notify your nurse and health care provider if the person is constipated more than twice per month. Tell other caretakers what you know and see.
- Write down what you see.

